

24 Epilogue

The Anglo-Russian Convention did not bring the British government what it had hoped. One setback was that as a follow-up to a meeting in Potsdam between Nicholas II and Wilhelm II in November 1910, the Potsdam Agreement was signed in St Petersburg on 19 August 1911. Germany and Russia had come to an understanding on the construction of a railway from Baghdad to Khanikin on the Ottoman-Persian border and from there to Tehran, giving Russia a rail link with the Baghdad Railway and providing Germany access to north Persia. In the eyes of contemporaries and later historians, Potsdam caused the alliance in the making between Great Britain, Russia and France to waver. As Taylor (1971: 464) wrote, in 1911 the 'Triple Entente seemed in process of disintegration'. Grey tried, as he would with regard to every complication arising over Persia, to give the impression that nothing was wrong. The British government welcomed any attempt of other powers to reach a better understanding with Germany, and such efforts did not affect the cordial relations of Great Britain with Russia.¹

Developments in Persia itself also did not help. Within five years Anglo-Russian rivalry there was as intense as ever, complete with British fears about a Russian army invading the country that was far stronger than any army Great Britain could muster, but also with the British wanting to advance into the neutral zone (Soroka 1911: 211, 244). For the British the uncomfortable prospect arose of St Petersburg aiming for a real partition of Persia, complete with the daunting idea of a joint land frontier with Russia. Some presented an even worse scenario. Shuster (1912: 174) was sure that because of London's reluctance to take firm countermeasures Russia was 'absolutely free to push forward her long-cherished plans for the absorption of Persia and the establishment of a naval base on the Persian Gulf'. Britons also began to worry again about India. By 1912, to some the Russian position in Persia once more constituted 'a grave menace' to the British position there.²

The apparent failure of the Convention gave rise to a campaign in Great Britain for its annulment. In response, those defending the agreement stressed that it had prevented the domestic situation in Persia from

1 Grey in House of Commons 13-3-1911 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1911/mar/13/army-and-navy-expenditure).

2 Ponsonby in House of Commons 21-2-1912 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1912/feb/21/persia-anglo-russian-agreement).

becoming worse and Anglo-Russian relations from deteriorating. Or, as Grey explained in a speech in Manchester in February 1912: 'Without it Russia, in the event of internal revolution, would have advanced to Teheran, and England would have been compelled to secure the Indian frontiers against Russian aggression' (*Hawera & Normanby Star* 19-2-1912). His explanation did not carry 'universal conviction', *The New York Times* (12-9-1912) wrote.

In fact, British disenchantment with Russia's Persia policy only increased. In 1914 it had become such that in June King George V, in a letter to Tsar Nicholas II, suggested 'a frank and friendly exchange of views on the whole situation in Persia'. He did so, he wrote, because his 'great desire to see a friendly feeling towards Russia preserved in British public opinion and in both political parties' (Carter 2010: 417).

At the end of the following month Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia. On 1 August Germany declared war on Russia and on the 3rd on France. On the 4th, after Germany had invaded Belgium, Great Britain declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. Japan joined the war on 23 August (while China would declare war on Germany in August 1917; one of the victims being the humiliating text on the Ketteler Memorial Arch, which was removed (Titus 2012: 46)). In the South Pacific, where no preparations had been made to hold off invasions, Germany lost its possessions in quick succession. In late August 1914 New Zealand occupied Samoa. Australia took New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago in September, but its forces failed to press on. Nauru, one of the Marshall Islands, was occupied on 6 November 1914, but in between Yap and the other smaller German islands in the South Pacific, those belonging to the Caroline, Marshall, Mariana and Palau groups, had already fallen to the Japanese fleet, which, according to the official explanation, had sailed south in search of German warships. The islands remained Japanese and some would see fierce fighting in World War Two. After World War Two they became trust territories of the United States. The Marshall Islands became independent in 1986. In that same year, the Caroline Islands became the Federated States of Micronesia. The Republic of Palau was constituted in 1994. The Marianas and Guam are still part of the United States.

To the north, in the Bay of Jiaozhou, a real battle was fought, even though, as a consequence of Tirpitz' planning for a war at sea against Great Britain in the North Sea, German naval command considered holding on to Qingdao inconsequential. It had also been realised that it was impossible to defend Qingdao against a determined foe, as the naval base was too far away from Germany. Defences were constructed, but after 1906 no new troops were stationed in Qingdao (Graichen and Gründer 2005: 225-7). The plan was that

in case of war the German warships in Qingdao should take to the sea and act as raiders (Nuhn 2002: 135). In late October the port and its fortifications were attacked by Japanese forces, and a token British one, and after days of bombardments and fierce fighting they fell on 7 November 1914. Those German warships that had not left port were scuttled.

In the Bay of Jiaozhou Japan allowed itself the same prerogatives Germany had wrestled from China. Japan's position in Shandong formed the first section of the so-called twenty-one demands Tokyo submitted to Beijing in January 1915. On 25 May, after Japan had reduced the number of its demands to thirteen and had issued an ultimatum, two separate treaties were signed. One was the Treaty Respecting the Province of Shandong, concluded 'with a view to the maintenance of general peace in the Extreme Orient and the further strengthening of the relations of friendship and good neighbourhood' between the two countries.³ China had to promise to 'give full assent' to all that Japan and Germany were to agree on about the transfer of the 'rights, interests, and concessions' of Germany in Shandong.⁴ China also had to open ports in the province. Such a stipulation, in this case on the coast of eastern Inner Mongolia, was also mentioned in the second agreement, the Treaty Respecting South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia, signed by China and Japan, more modestly 'with a view to developing their economic relations'.⁵ In South Manchuria Japanese citizens were given the right to lease land for the purposes of trade, manufacture and agriculture, while the duration of the leases of Port Arthur and Dalian and the railway contracts were extended to 99 years. Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931.

Germany formally lost its overseas possessions at the Peace Conference of Versailles where it was castigated for 'its failure in the field of colonial civilisation' (Conrad 2012: 186). The decision and the denunciation of the German colonial record, the *koloniale Schuld*, or 'fabrication of colonial culpability', caused almost general dismay in Germany. Millions of Germans signed a statement protesting 'the theft of their colonies' (Knopp 2011: 25-6). Under a mandate from the League of Nations, New Zealand came to govern German Samoa; German New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago and Nauru went to Australia; and Japan was assigned Jiaozhou Bay and the islands its navy had occupied in the South Pacific.⁶ France remained

3 Treaty respecting the Province of Shantung 25-5-1915, Preamble (www.chinaforeignrelations.net/node/179).

4 Ibid., Art. 1 (www.chinaforeignrelations.net/node/179).

5 Treaty respecting South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia, Preamble (Manchuria 1921: 157-9).

6 Japan returned Jiaozhou to China after the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922.

empty-handed. This did not go down well. France had supported Tokyo's claims to the islands that had fallen into Japanese hands, a French warship had assisted the Australian navy in occupying New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago, yet France had received nothing in return. None of the former German possessions in the Pacific was assigned to it. France was not even awarded an annexation of the New Hebrides (Pelleray 1922: 98-9).

New Zealand granted West Samoa independence in 1962. East Samoa remains an unincorporated territory of the United States, self-governing since 1967. A similar status was given to the Cook Islands by New Zealand in 1965. Papua New Guinea (including the Bismarck Archipelago) became independent in 1975. Of the other Pacific island groups, Fiji became an independent Dominion in 1970. In the same year the British protectorate over the kingdom of Tonga was terminated. In 1978 Great Britain granted independence to Tuvalu (the Ellice Islands) and the Solomon Islands and in 1979 to the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati). The New Hebrides became the Republic of Vanuatu in 1980. New Caledonia remained French.

The desire to make a good profit, expectations about the natural richness and trade potentials of regions hardly known, being lured by short-lived booms, religious sentiments, national pride and distrust of the intentions of other nations were a hazardous mix. Some of the territories and settlements acquired in the Far East and the South Pacific by European nations, the United States and Japan became profitable. A number of the treaty ports in China thrived, Rangoon would become one of the major ports in British India, the Malay Peninsula would have its rubber and tin, and Samoa became a 'model colony', which as of 1909 no longer needed any financial assistance from Berlin (Nuhn 2002: 107-8).

Other acquisitions turned out to be less of a success. Germany's brief and noisy exploits in the Pacific had served a political aim. Acquiring a foothold in the Pacific had been a matter of pride for successive German governments. It linked up with a nationalist drive, with Germans rejoicing in Germany's new status as a world power that stood its ground. In retrospect, there was less to be proud of economically. As early as 1889 the Neu-Guinea-Compagnie had run into serious problems in Kaiser-Wilhelms-Land and the Bismarck Archipelago. In October 1898, when it was evident that the company was no longer capable of administering the region, Berlin reclaimed the rights and duties it had delegated. In return, the Neu-Guinea-Compagnie received a capital injection of 4 million Marks.

In Jiaozhou Bay, investments by Krupp and other German companies failed to materialise (Steinmetz 2007: 438). Though the city of Qingdao and its port facilities gained admiration in Germany and abroad and trade

increased over time, within years it was realised that the leased area, now advertised as a *Handelskolonie*, or trade colony, was too small to be commercially viable. Only the railway (opened on 1 June 1904) was a success. The German mining activities were not. The coals were expensive and not of the quality expected (Conrad 2012: 62; Gründer 1999: 109). The mining company *Shantung-Bergbau-Gesellschaft* could only survive thanks to its mother company, which also owned the railway and offered low transportation prices for the coals (Wertheimer 1913: 93).

With its function as a strong naval base in doubt, Tirpitz and the navy had set their eyes on developing the territory into a *Musterkolonie*, or model colony, highlighting such features as urban planning, measures to promote hygiene (which the Western nations prided themselves made them different from the rest of the world) and the education of the Chinese population. Qingdao was, as Wertheimer (1913: 95-6) put it, turned into a 'big German permanent exhibition in the Far East'. The bay became Germany's most expensive colonial possession. Much of its development had to be financed by the state. An aggregate sum of 200 million Marks in government money was spent between 1898 and 1914, of which only 36 million Marks came from local taxes (Gründer 1999: 110). Such realities made German newspapers suggest that Germany had better terminate the lease at least from 1906.⁷ The financial burden also gave opponents of a German colonial policy the ammunition they needed. The leading social democrat, Ferdinand August Bebel, stressing the evils of colonialism as well as the money overseas territories cost Germany, even suggested selling Jiaozhou Bay to Japan (Graichen and Gründer 2005: 224; Knopp 2011: 21).

The colonial race in the Western Pacific had also saddled Great Britain with some liabilities. When the British took possession of New Guinea some had vented the same optimistic fantasies about the island's potential that others had done to justify expansion elsewhere. Among them was Samuel Griffith, Premier of Queensland, who in 1886 wrote about Europeans who would settle there and 'the gradual attraction of natives to industrial pursuits' (Legge 1956: 47). When British New Guinea came under Australian administration in 1906, similar confidence was expressed by a Royal Commission which had to map out its future; but maybe such institutions have to come up with something positive. It wrote about awaking 'the Papuan from his lotus-eater's dream' and made suggestions about how to develop British New Guinea economically (ibid.: 128). It was not to be. The region was far from self-supporting. As Legge (1956: 3) concluded: 'Development

7 Satow to Grey 5-4-1906 (PRO FO 800 44).

of the territory was on too small a scale to provide a sufficient revenue to meet the costs of administration' (which were kept to a bare minimum). Investors stayed away, while another problem was shortage of labour, still enhanced by the fact that in British New Guinea, as part of Australia, non-white workers could not be recruited (*ibid.*: 155).

As contemporaries had prophesied, Wei-hai-wei did not turn out to be a great asset. Any plans to transform it into a defensible naval station had to be cancelled when the Boer War strained the British budget. Two years after Great Britain had leased Wei-hai-wei, almost nothing had been done yet to turn the place into a naval base of some sort. Or, as one contemporary politician noticed, 'not a single fort' had been constructed, 'not a gun mounted; practically no buildings ... erected ... Beyond a little dredging ... nothing seems to have been done'.⁸ Another politician called Wei-hai-wei 'a miserable little station'.⁹ On the Admiralty's advice the government decided to withdraw the about 1,100 troops stationed there and to stop fortification works in early 1902. Wei-hai-wei was to be maintained, in the words of the Colonial Office, as 'a flying naval base, and as a depôt and drill-ground and sanatorium for the China Squadron in North China' (Wright and Cartwright 1908: 773). After the Russo-Japanese War, Wei-hai-wei lost much of its rationale, making the British diplomat Satow suggest in 1906 that should Germany abandon the Bay of Jiaozhou, there was not much reason for Great Britain to hold on to Wei-hai-wei.¹⁰ The concession did have one clear function. It served as a beach resort for sailors of the British fleet and for members of the diplomatic corps in Beijing and their families, who in summer would leave the capital for the temple-converted-villas of Wei-hai-wei; a reason for some to mockingly ask why the British government was still spending money on a 'bathing station'.¹¹ But German Qingdao – which among its attractions boasted 'charming scenery, excellent bathing, and a good band' (Wright and Cartwright 1908: 812) – became a more popular holiday destination for foreigners. Wei-hai-wei was returned to China in 1930. Hong Kong remained British until July 1997 when it became a Special Administrative Region of China. Two years later Macau was returned to China and got the same status.

8 Walton in House of Commons 30-3-1900 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1900/mar/30/british-commercial-and-political-interests-in-china).

9 Lord Balcarras in House of Commons 30-3-1900 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1900/mar/30/british-commercial-and-political-interests-in-china).

10 Satow to Grey 5-4-1906 (PRO FO 800 44).

11 Whitley in House of Commons 12-7-1905 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1905/jul/12/navy-estimates-1905-6).

Great Britain's hold over Afghanistan turned out to be weak. After the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919 the country regained its full independence. According to the Rawalpindi Agreement of 8 August 1919, Kabul no longer had to turn to London for directives for its foreign policy. In 1921 Russia and Afghanistan signed a Treaty of Friendship.

Similar to Great Britain, and in spite of its initial optimism, France did not succeed in turning the leasing of Guangzhouwan into something worthwhile. The territory was returned to China under the Sino-French agreement of 28 February 1946. Only in recent decades, with China's economy booming, has Guangzhouwan grown into an important economic centre, as have Wei-hai-wei, Chongqing in Sichuan, the object of Anglo-British rivalry, and Yingkou and Harbin in Manchuria. In Vietnam and the South Pacific colonisation proved a problem. The actual number of Frenchmen prepared to settle in the new possessions was much lower than advocates of a French Empire would have been pleased with. In New Caledonia, after efforts to have convicts cultivate the soil had become a failure, a not-well-thought-out scheme between 1895 and 1902 to attract French settlers for the cultivation of coffee and other tropical products became a fiasco as well (Lorin 1906: 424-6). With respect to Indochina, there were complaints about Frenchmen not wanting to settle and capital staying away (Étienne 1897: xxi). People who travelled to Indochina in the late nineteenth century were not only struck by how French Saigon and Hanoi looked with their boulevards and pavement cafés. They also noted how dominant the military and civil service were in colonial society. One of them, Norman (1900: 78), estimated that in Saigon 'nine out of ten Frenchmen [were] occupied in purveying either French luxuries or French personal services to the official and military classes'. He was sure that without 'the shop-keepers, the barbers, the tailors, the wine-merchants, the tobacconists and the restaurant keepers [there] would be virtually no Frenchmen left who was not a soldier, a sailor, or a civil servant'. Throughout the French period the number of French settlers remained relatively small (Cooper 2005: 82).

Russia, following its military defeats and the Revolution, re-emerged as a power in a relatively short span of time, which confirmed what British observers had said on earlier occasions about Russian reverses. By 1921 intense British-Russian rivalry in Persia had reappeared. In the Far East, in the aftermath of the Revolution, Russia lost control over Manchuria. Due to 'complete political disorganisation in Russia', as it was formulated in an agreement between the Russo-Asiatic Bank and China in October 1920, the Chinese Eastern Railway had stopped functioning. The situation allowed China, as the Agreement stated, to 'assume provisionally ... supreme

control' over the railway. It did so 'not only for the safeguarding of security in the region served by the railway and for the maintenance of communications which are of world interest, but also for effective protection over the property of the said railway'.¹² By 1924 Russia was back and strong enough to present China with what *The Argus* (21-3-1924) concluded was a 'virtual ultimatum'. The Sino-Russian Treaty of 31 May 1924 reconfirmed the railway zone and its joint administration. The Chinese Eastern Railway continued to be a bone of contention until, finally, Russia formally handed over the railway and its property to China in 1950 without compensation. This became effective at the end of 1952 (Elleman 1994: 459, Shengfa 2010: 185). In 1955 Russia also returned Port Arthur and Dalian, which it had conquered from the Japanese in August 1945, to China.

The colonies, protectorates and international settlements in Asia and the Western Pacific are a thing of the past. Their legacy include the office buildings, houses and railway stations which have survived time. The presence of a significant number of foreign administrators, advisers, soldiers, businessmen and other temporary settlers also accelerated the spread of Western dress, music and sports, and influenced the way soldiers are still marching, saluting and shouting. By initiating or accelerating movement of labour new ethnic tensions were created that to this day can be a source of violence and discrimination. The unwanted consequence of Gordon's decision in the 1870s to turn to India to solve Fiji labour problem is that tense relations between Indians and indigenous Fijians still dominate the country's politics today. In Malaysia relations between Malay, Chinese and Indians are also uneasy, but here the British only accelerated a development that was already underway.

The boundaries fixed, and in some cases imprecisely mapped, by the colonial powers to protect their interests presented, and continue to present, their problems. The Durand Line of 1893 remains a sensitive topic in Afghanistan and gave Pakistan a frontier area that is difficult to control. In 1962 India and China fought a war over their border in the Himalayas and they are still quarrelling about it now (in 1963 Pakistan and China concluded a Frontier Agreement, settling their differences). In 1969 Russia and China had their armed conflict over the Ussuri and Xinjiang frontiers. When in 1991, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan became independent states they inherited Russia's boundary

12 Agreement supplementary to the contract for the construction and operation of the Chinese Eastern Railway between the Russo-Asiatic Bank and China, 2-10-1920, Preamble (Manchuria 1921: 210-1).

disputes with China. All three signed their own agreements with Beijing, returning some – but not that much – disputed territory to China. China (and Taiwan) and Japan are still quarrelling over the Senkaku or Diaoyu Islands, which Japan occupied during the Sino-Japanese War. One recent manifestation of tense Sino-Japanese relations was the opening of an Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall in the railway station of Harbin in January 2014 in honour of the person who shot Ito Hirobumi there in 1909. South Korea and Japan are in dispute about the Takeshima or Dokdo Islands (also known as the Liancourt Rocks), located in the Sea of Japan (or, if one prefers its Korean name, the East Sea), formally claimed by Japan in January 1905 during the Russo-Japanese War. A dispute between Thailand and Cambodia over a small piece of land surrounding the Preah Vihear Temple, which can be traced back to the March 1907 treaty between Thailand and France, escalated into exchanges of fire between 2008 and 2011.

